United Nations S/PV.7851

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7851st meeting
Friday, 23 December 2016, 10.45 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. González de Linares Palou	(Spain)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Martins
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Taula
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Coleman
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in Liberia

Special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2016/968)

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16-46228 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Liberia

Special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2016/968)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Liberia to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2016/1096, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United States of America.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/968, which contains the special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Angola, China, Egypt, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

Against:

None

Abstaining:

France, Russian Federation and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted as resolution 2333 (2016).

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements after the vote.

Ms. Coleman (United States of America): Liberia will soon mark 14 years of peace — the same period of time as the devastating civil wars that inflicted immeasurable suffering on the country's people, ravaged the country's infrastructure and left a generation mired in poverty.

And yet, since that time so much that was destroyed has been rebuilt with the support of the United States, the United Nations and others in the international community, including roads, power generation, electricity grids, schools, hospitals and the social fabric of communities torn apart by war. As Liberia has made this progress, it has taken on more responsibility for functions that were once carried out by the United Nations. On 30 June, Liberia assumed full responsibility for its own security from the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

We commend the brave men and women who have served as United Nations peacekeepers and police, as well as the countries from which they come, which played a critically important role in restoring a climate of security that enabled Liberia to emerge from conflict and rebuild. But despite more than a dozen years of peace, Liberia's recovery is unfinished, its institutions are fragile, and corruption and impunity remain all too common. The deadly Ebola outbreak that began in 2014 paralysed the country, taking the lives of nearly 5,000 Liberians and undercutting some of the progress the country had made.

In 2017, Liberians will elect a new leader to succeed President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. As the country's first peaceful and democratic transition of power from one living President to another in seven decades, the election holds the promise of elevating Liberia alongside other models of post-conflict transition in the region that contrast undemocratic trends elsewhere on the continent, where leaders have refused to hold elections, rigged their outcomes or rejected the results when they have lost. We are committed to working with the Liberian Government to ensure a peaceful and secure environment in which the people can participate in free, fair and peaceful elections in October 2017 and through the stable transition to a new Government in January 2018.

This mandate recognizes that the Government of Liberia has risen to the challenge of ensuring security throughout the country since the 30 June transition, and further reduces the size of UNMIL, cutting the military presence by two-thirds and the police presence by half. We expect a further reduction in the civilian presence as well. But it also ensures a continued UNMIL presence

to support the Liberian security services through this historic election in order to consolidate the hard-earned security gains that Liberia has made.

In March 2018, UNMIL will close, but Liberia's ongoing reconciliation and reconstruction efforts will continue, as will its work to strengthen good governance and transparency, improve accountability and meet the basic needs of the Liberian people. That is why peacebuilding efforts must start long before the peacekeeping mission ends. Indeed, such efforts should be well under way already, and they must accelerate immediately.

To that end, resolution 2333 (2016) directs the Secretary-General to prepare a report on a peacebuilding strategy for Liberia that would guide the transition of UNMIL's civilian tasks not only to the Government of Liberia but also to the appropriate United Nations, multilateral and bilateral partners that can bolster the Government's efforts. Liberia's continuing peace, stability and prosperity and all that the Liberian people, Government and the international community have invested in the country depend on getting the transition right. We all have a stake in ensuring that it succeeds.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian delegation abstained in the voting on resolution 2333 (2016), extending the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). We believe that it is unacceptable to extend the mandate under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations in circumstances where Blue Helmets are anticipating exclusively peacebuilding tasks.

We were surprised by the text in the document concerning the scope of the military and police components of the Mission, which, as we know, will be engaged in promoting elections, reform the security and justice sectors, and broadcast United Nations radio. We do not understand why those purely peaceful tasks require the presence of 700 armed peacekeepers and 5 military helicopters in the country.

We have always been sympathetic to the positions of Governments hosting United Nations peacekeeping missions, but that does not mean that in formulating its decisions, the Council Security should not take into account all factors determining the situation in that country. At the same time, we should not forget that the Secretary-General, in his latest report on Liberia (S/2016/968) clearly states that the security situation remains stable and that the country has not experienced any military threat for several years.

We note the position of the Liberian Government, calling for an extension of the Mission's mandate in its current form for one year. However, we are also forced to note that this would appear to conceal the usual meddling and attempts to assign the United Nations tasks that Monrovia should long since have been able to assume itself. We do not share the conclusions of the Secretary-General's report that the justification for maintaining the presence of the peacekeeping operation in Liberia is a test of the ability of national institutions to maintain stability. In other words, United Nations personnel will be in Liberia just to be on the safe side if the situation should deteriorate in the run-up to the 2017 elections. In so doing, we will divert troops and resources that the United Nations sorely needs in other hot spots.

In that regard, we sincerely regret that the penholders refused to reflect in the draft version an alternative to the mass presence of peacekeepers, whereby the rapid reaction force of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali could have been proactively deployed in the election period. In that connection, we have to reiterate our concerns that working methods of resolution sponsors, which ignored this and other sensible proposals of a number of delegations. We cannot agree with the explanation that the positions of delegations diverged significantly and that there was no possibility to bring them closer together. Such a situation calls for further efforts to develop a compromise, especially as the time left the end of the UNMIL mandate allowed us to do so.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France abstained in the voting on resolution 2333 (2016).

We commend the outstanding progress achieved by Liberia since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2003. For the past six months, the Liberian authorities have been fully responsible for maintaining security on their own terrority. In that regard, I hail the leadership and vision demonstrated by President Ellen John Sirleaf. Following a long period of peacekeeping, Liberia has entered the peacebuilding phase. That is why the Security Council today recognized that the situation in Liberia no longer constitutes a threat to international peace and security. We congratulate the Liberian authorities and people yet again on that success.

Yet while the Security Council recognizes that the situation in Liberia no longer threatens international peace and security, it has, sadly, not learned its lesson. In substance, the resolution poses two major problems.

The first is that it maintains Liberia's culture of dependency on the Blue Helmets. By extending the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) for 15 months, the Security Council paradoxically maintains the presence of a military peacekeeping force in that country just as it recognizes that there is no further threat to peace and security there. The Security Council thereby risks preserving a culture of dependency and preventing the development of Liberian national capacities.

France has always stressed that the Security Council should take account of the prospects of the third presidential elections in Liberia since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, to be held in October 2017. We recall that it is precisely for that reason that, in June, the Security Council authorized in resolution 2295 (2016) the quick reaction force — which is currently stationed in Côte D'Ivoire and will soon be deployed to Mali — to be deployed temporarily to Liberia if required. The early deployment of the quick reaction force ahead of the autumn elections, as it did successfully in the Central African Republic early this year, would have been a solution well adapted to the needs and circumstances. But that proposal was not heeded. This year, the Council noted with satisfaction the success of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, whose imminent scheduled withdrawal it approved. Liberia is another success story for United Nations peacekeeping, which we believe the Security Council should have recognized.

The second problem with the resolution is that wastes valuable peacekeeping resources. For the past six months, the police and military contingents of UNMIL have had no tasks to carry out. By artificially maintaining more than 700 military and police personnel, as well as numerous United Nations helicopters, in Liberia for the next 15 months, the Security Council will deprive the United Nations of valuable resources to respond to serious crises elsewhere, particularly in Africa. The Security Council is keeping five United Nations helicopters even as the Blue Helmets in Mali, who are deployed in the most deadly peacekeeping operation in the world, are crying out for resources to protect themselves and undertake medical evacuations.

With regard to working methods, we can only regret the absence of genuine negotiations among Council members. Our proposals, as well as those submitted by many of our partners, were barely into account. We consistently offered solutions that would have allowed us to strike a compromise among the various positions. With other States, we introduced solutions that were quite different from our initial positions. In particular, we were open with respect to the timetable and modalities for the UNMIL drawdown, but our proposals were never taken into serious account.

We hope that we shall all find lessons to learn from this episode, and that in the future we are able to strengthen the Council's unity on this key topic.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom abstained in the voting on the final mandate renewal for the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) because we do not agree that the mandate put forward for adoption represents the best approach to closing the Mission or for continuing to operate in Liberia over the next 15 months.

The United Kingdom is clear that there is a role for a continued United Nations presence in Liberia, with a focus on peace consolidation and paving the way for an orderly, timely exit. Six months ago, we saw the successful transfer of responsibility for security from UNMIL to the Government of Liberia. That was an important and successful step taken by the Government of Liberia, and it was a step towards the departure of the United Nations peacekeeping mission.

UNMIL has been a success, and a success for United Nations peacekeeping. It demonstrates the real difference that United Nations peacekeepers can make to civilians on the ground. But we must use our peacekeeping resources wisely, where they are really needed. The UNMIL success means that we should not draw out its lifespan unnecessarily. There is no active conflict in Liberia and we do not expect armed groups to reform, so it is not appropriate to include the protection of civilians by UNMIL in the mandate.

We welcome the inclusion of the human rights promotion and protection mandate, with special attention to continuing violations and abuses committed against children and women. There is also more work to be done to strengthen the Government of Liberia's efforts to combat sexual and gender-based crimes, and it is important that this work be handed over smoothly

to the United Nations country team as UNMIL winds down.

The focus now needs to be on peace consolidation and preparation for the departure of UNMIL. We call on UNMIL to use all available resources in its final 15 months to ensure a smooth and orderly close down. In that regard, we are disappointed that $81.6 million of assessed contributions in the special account for UNMIL remain unpaid. That must be addressed in the month ahead.

Mr. Martins (Angola): Angola voted in favour of resolution 2333 (2016), renewing the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) for more than 12 months, based mainly on our overall evaluation of the very positive role of UNMIL, especially in coming electoral period, and on the concrete request of the Government of Liberia, in solidarity with and understanding of the challenges can be faced during the electoral period and the need for stability. That is why we voted in favour of the resolution.

Angola regrets that the resolution was not adopted unanimously by all Council members, as that would have shown a more resolute and united position of the Council, especially for a mission that can be considered a success story of the Council. I hope that we will continue to engage with UNMIL and the Government, especially in this period of peace consolidation, which is a very critical phase. We do not want to see a return to a situation that has been positively corrected by the Mission while in Liberia.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): In recent years, the overall security situation in Liberia has remained stable. Economic development has resumed and the Liberian Government, under the leadership of President Johnson-Sirleaf, has made positive efforts in maintaining stability and economic development. China appreciates the efforts made in that regard and calls on the international community to continue to provide assistance to Liberia. China has always believed that United Nations peacekeeping operations should make adjustments in the light of the actual conditions and developments on the ground until their final exit. In the process, the will of the affected country must be fully respected and consultations with regional countries and regional and subregional organizations strengthened.

Over the years, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has played a significant role in maintaining peace and stability in Liberia. China supports the continued presence of UNMIL in Liberia in an appropriate form. It continues to support Liberia in stabilizing its situation and to assist it in strengthening its capacity-building for the military, police and security sectors so as to ensure the smooth process of general elections and preserve the hard-earned peace dividends. Given those considerations, China voted in favour of resolution 2333 (2016). China will work with the international community and continue to play a positive and constructive role in promoting peace, stability and development in Liberia.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Uruguay voted in favour of resolution 2333 (2016), extending the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), as we feel it fitting and sensible to proceed to a reduction of the military and police component, striking a balance between the situation on the ground and the request of the country concerned, Liberia. Besides the reduction of military and police forces, we have retained a component that will monitor human rights in the country, which we welcome.

Nonetheless, Uruguay again notes the lack of commitment and constructive spirit in the evolution of negotiations on the text. During the briefing and the consultations that took place on 12 December, major differences emerged in the positions of members with respect to the future of the United Nations presence in Liberia after December. In that respect, Uruguay believes that the best way to overcome differences is through negotiations and constructive dialogue in the search for shared positions acceptable to all Council members.

As we stated when we renewed the mandate for the United Nations Mission in South Sudan a few days ago (see S/PV.7840), the Security Council must show that it is able to adopt resolutions that achieve the broadest possible support among its members. The role of penholder is crucial in such negotiating situations, and it is desirable that penholders demonstrate more flexibility and be more receptive to proposals from other Council members.

The international community is addressing a large number of crises, and the Council has already revealed differences and weaknesses in its actions in many. As there are shared positions on the fundamental approach to addressing the crisis in Liberia, we believe it is unnecessary to add such divisions to the matter at hand. We trust that procedures will improve in 2017.

Mr. Taula (New Zealand): New Zealand voted in favour of resolution 2333 (2016). This is a critical period for Liberia. The Council's consideration of the future United Nations presence in the country was important, given the considerable gains that Liberia has achieved in recent years, including taking over full responsibility for security from the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) earlier this year. Today's resolution rightfy commends the successful completion of that process.

After 13 years of UNMIL support in the country, it was right for the Council to consider the next steps for the United Nations engagement in the country and to carefully consider the best interests of Liberia itself. New Zealand saw considerable merit in arguments made in favour of the United Nations providing support to Liberia through 2017, including the elections period, but to bring to an end the current peacekeeping mission. The current resolution extends the mandate of the Mission for a final period until 30 March 2018.

New Zealand considers it important that the Security Council convey two key messages. First, the United Nations should continue to support Liberia in a strong partnership as it enters the next phase in its history. Secondly, UNMIL will rightly withdraw in early 2018, given that the Liberians have demonstrated that a United Nations peacekeeping mission in the country will no longer be warranted in the light of the significant progress made.

We would echo the concerns expressed about the process followed in negotiating the resolution. We feel that more could have been done to bridge the diverging views within the Council in order to reach consensus and thereby send a united message to Liberia.

Finally, we again commend Liberia for the progress made in the country. We wish it continued success in the important period ahead.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make an explanation of vote in my national capacity.

Liberia is a success story on the Council's agenda. It started as an extremely complex situation and, thanks to the joint efforts of all Liberian society and the leadership of President Johnson-Sirleaf, we are entering an electoral year with very good prospects for stability and a peaceful transition of power.

The international community has made significant efforts to support the peacebuilding process, and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) is the embodiment of such efforts. Resolution 2333 (2016) extends the final United Nations presence in the country to affirm and end a process that is firmly headed towards success, although there are some aspects that still require attention, such as the appropriate maintenance of the human rights component.

We voted in favour of resolution 2333 (2016) because we are convinced that peace missions are not designed to go on indefinitely and in the understanding that this renewal of the UNMIL mandate is and must be the final one.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Liberia.

Mr. Sulunteh (Liberia): When last we were honoured with the opportunity to intervene in the Council (see S/PV.7824), we put before those present the concerns of our Government and people. Today we will not bore the members of the Council with a repetition of those concerns. What we want to do today is to thank everyone — those that voted in favour of resolution 2333 (2016) as well as those that abstained.

We note all of the concerns that have been expressed here, but we also recognize that the action we have taken today on behalf of Liberia will go a long way towards consolidating the gains we have already made. For us, that signals that the Security Council continues to demonstrate a willingness not just to punish wrongdoing, but to reward success and the actions of countries emerging from conflict that are determined to do the right thing by themselves and with the international community.

Thus, on behalf of a grateful nation and a grateful Government, we look forward to the continued engagement of this Council and to working with the United Nations Mission in Liberia over the course of the coming year and to bringing that mission to an end, as we promised, in one year.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.